CELEBRATING 300 YEARS

Historical Markers For the Counties

On March 4, 1981, Gov. Dick Thornburgh signed a proclamation officially launching the celebration of Pennsylvania's three centuries in history. For the past thirty-five years, particular persons, places and events that have attained significance during these three centuries have been recognized by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission through historical markers. Now, this celebration and ongoing program have come together in a project for the dedication of a special marker at each of the state's sixty-seven county seats.

Since its beginning in 1946, the PHMC's Historical Marker Program has installed over 1,350 markers with blue backgrounds and gold lettering topped by the state coat of arms in all sixty-seven counties of the Commonwealth. No one section of the state has been consciously favored and markers have ranged in their coverage from pointing out Christ Church in Philadelphia, to noting the Eagle Ironworks in Centre County, to commemorating Tom Mix in Cameron County. Until this year, however, none of the existing markers had focused on the distinctive character of Pennsylvania's counties which–beginning with three in 1682 and reaching the present figure of sixty-seven in 1878–have formed a matrix against which the social and cultural development of this Commonwealth can be viewed.

It seemed particularly appropriate that a key part of the 300th anniversary observance–which is, after all, to be a celebration for the whole state–should be the dedication of a special historical marker for each of the counties. Plans for these markers began in 1979, and from the beginning people from each and every county have been involved. County historical societies were asked to furnish the names of coordinators and also to suggest information for inclusion in the marker texts. As the markers are completed they are being shipped directly to the counties, there to be stored until their dedications. This process began last December and should be completed before the end of this year when the sixty-seventh marker is delivered. By contrast, the formal dedications which began this March are expected to continue throughout the year 1982.

Each of these county markers will be identical in appearance. The content will, of course, be different: underneath the name of the county there will be information on its formation and (usually) the origin of its name and the establishment of the county seat, as well as one or two significant facts distinctive to the county's history.

Two county markers have already been dedicated as part of this program–Warren County (March 12) and Lycoming County (April 13). Both of these dedications were held on the anniversary dates of their counties' formation, and it is anticipated that more of the ensuing dedications to be held over the next two years will be keyed in to significant anniversaries–including that of William Penn's first arrival in Pennsylvania aboard the ship *Welcome* in the fall of 1682.

It is envisioned that most of the sixty-seven markers will be installed at the county courthouses, there to be seen for decades to come. In a few cases, another spot such as a museum or county historical society building may be chosen, but in each instance local wishes will be the chief determining factor. The erection and dedication of these very special markers will have fulfilled their objective if they help to bring Pennsylvania's 300th Birthday celebration home to the individual counties–and if they foster a heightened awareness of each county's distinctive heritage, both among visitors and among its own people.

LYCOMING COUNTY
Formed April 13, 1795 out of Northumberland County. The name (from a Delaware Indian word) honors Lycoming Creek. Williamsport, the county seat, became a borough, 1806, and a city, 1866. Once a great lumbering center. Birthplace of Little League Baseball.

Photo by Craig W. Smith

This Lycoming County marker was dedicated at ceremonies attended by George Beyer (PHMC), Commissioner Paul Bloom and Kenneth Carl of the county historical society.